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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHMFISS/US ARMY DMS WASHDC
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
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SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MLS (EMERY, WEST)
SECDEF FOR ISA (LAI)

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TAGS: [LA](#) [MARR](#) [MASS](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#)
SUBJECT: LAO DEFENSE ATTACHE TO ARRIVE WASHINGTON, D.C.
JUNE 6, 2009

REF: 08 VIENTIANE 0665

UNCLASSIFIED BUT SENSITIVE; PLEASE PROTECT ACCORDINGLY.

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: New Lao Defense Attache COL Kenekeo Pholsena is scheduled to arrive in Washington, D.C. on Saturday, June 6, 2009, to take up his post as the first Lao Defense Attache in the United States since the 1975 change of government in Laos. COL Kenekeo is an important choice: he is a senior military officer with experience as the Lao DATT in Burma, Indonesia, and China before being assigned to open the new Lao DAO in DC. Moreover, he is a member of the powerful Pholsena family, a leading family within Lao society. The U.S. DAO opened in Vientiane in December 2008 (reftel). End summary.

¶2. (SBU) The United States and Lao agreed to exchange Defense Attache Offices in 2007. The U.S. Defense Attache to Laos, LTC Jamie McAden, attended the December 5, 2008, opening of the U.S. DAO in Vientiane and called on senior Lao officials as well as members of the local foreign DATT corps to introduce himself and the new U.S. DAO. After finishing his training in the United States in June, he will return to Vientiane to take up his post full-time at the beginning of July, 2009. The U.S. DAO is the eighth in Vientiane, joining the DAOs from five ASEAN countries (Indonesia, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Burma), Russia, and China.

¶3. (SBU) COL Kenekeo is the second of twelve children of former Lao Foreign Minister Kinim Pholsena. Trained as a medical doctor at the Moscow Medical Institute in the 1960s, he was the Lao DATT in Burma (1996-1998), Indonesia (2003-2006) and Beijing (2007-2009). He was promoted to colonel in 1996. COL Kenekeo's older sister was Vice President of the Lao Women's Union, a key mass organization of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party. Younger siblings include the Minister to the Prime Minister's Office for Water and the Environment, the Minister of Public Works and Transportation, a Vice Minister of Industry and Commerce, the Deputy Director General of the Lao Railway Department, and two private businessmen among others.

¶4. (SBU) COL Pholsena is scheduled to arrive Dulles Airport in northern Virginia at 1040 on Saturday, June 6, 2009, via All Nippon Airways flight NH 2.

¶5. (SBU) COMMENT: The exchange of DAOs is a significant step forward in U.S.-Lao relations. MIA cooperation has been

underway in Laos for 25 years, and PACOM-funded Humanitarian Assistance Program projects have been constructed since the 1990s. However, broader mil-mil relations have been difficult until recently. During the past two years, PACOM and PACAF have undertaken medical training programs and donated medical supplies to a broad range of Lao medical facilities, more Lao officials including military officers have attended U.S.-funded training programs, and the first Lao military students have attended the Defense Language Institute. With the arrival of LTC McAden this summer, we expect the bilateral mil-mil relationship to continue to expand and improve.

HUSO